

The Grammy's Must Honor Black Women Correctly

The names Grammy Awards and Beyoncé tend to raise a similar amount of national influence. Buzz words one hears can be: respectable, controversial, 'overrated' (a favorite for critics of Beyoncé) and iconic. Beyoncé has provided music and media to the culture, with her extensive discography along with being a veteran in the industry. Still, the Grammys remain a frequent discussion in American society. Despite being despised by fans and artists alike—the Recording Academy cites their mission as being “to *recognize excellence* in the recording arts and sciences, *cultivate the well-being* of the music community, and *ensure* that **music remains an indelible part of our culture**”. The Grammy's have achieved that mission but, in an opposite direction then they originally set out to achieve. Especially the Album of the Year award.

The award show was created as a solution to a problem in the 1950s. The popularity of the Hollywood Walk of Fame was intriguing to recording executives who had nominated music legends they thought were deserving of a star. A realization that these musicians were second string to movie stars; the execs came up with the idea to create award shows in a format similar to the Emmys and Oscars. The Grammys would not be aired live until the 13th Annual Grammy Awards in 1971.

The Album of the Year award itself is a status symbol, bringing great publicity to winners, skyrocketing projects by artists such as Billie Eilish, Arcade Fire and Jon Batiste. Many have differing opinions on whether or not that influence means anything to nominees and winners. The Grammys lacks one key, awarding the favored winners. Recently— Beyoncé Knowles-Carter and black women in music.

Beyoncé's name invokes many reactions to her mere presence. Regardless if one is a fan or not; it is difficult to deny her impact. She began her career in the late 1990s with girl group Destiny's Child and went solo in 2003. This would skyrocket Knowles onto a new level of stardom. Now with seven studio albums within her 25 years of experience in music; the triple threat can do everything; sing, act, dance, own billion dollar businesses. Beyoncé has been nominated for the Album of the Year award four times,

in *I Am...Sasha Fierce* (2008), *Beyoncé* (2013), *Lemonade* (2016) and this past Grammys for *Renaissance* (2022).

Each time she has been nominated for the Album of the Year award, she is neglected and one of her fellow nominees is selected. Common themes of these winners are; they are White (with only 11 Black artists total winning in the history of the awards). Taylor Swift won with *Fearless* (2008) at the 2009 Grammys, Beck's *Morning Phase* (2014) in 2015, "25" (2015) by Adele won in 2016. The singer dedicated her award and spent her speech praising Beyoncé's "Lemonade" (2016) while conjointly admiring the singer's cultural significance. "Harry's House" (2022) by Harry Styles winning at the most recent award show. All four snubs were debated amongst fans from each artist and became national news each time. While each Album of the Year loss that Beyoncé has had; it revealed a consistent pattern throughout the awards history. There is a lack of Black female musicians that have won Album of the Year.

In a 65-year-old history, the Grammys have only awarded three black women for Album of the Year. Natalie Cole for *Unforgettable...with Love* (1991) in 1992, Whitney Houston for the soundtrack to her film *The Bodyguard* (1992) in 1994 and Lauryn Hill for *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998) in 1999. When one takes the time to consider how much Black female artists were overlooked, they realize figures like Diana Ross and Aretha Franklin may have won Grammys but *never* Album of the Year. Despite what critics and fans tend to think, the Album of the Year award has become momentous for forming a reputation as a reassurance that recognizes said winners abilities. Vocals, songwriting, mixing, etc. -- which some awards are announced on a streamed smaller broadcast, are all acknowledged with an Album of the Year award.

The lack of winners seemingly shows correlation with the Recording Academy members who vote on decisions made for the Grammys. The Recording Academy describes themselves as, "a not-for-profit that represents a diversity of music makers and professionals. Our membership focuses on service, advocacy and recognition of the art and craft of music" currently having more than 12,000 voting

members and over 3,000 professional (do not vote) members. 53% of members are White, 23% Black, 9% Hispanic, 5% “other” and 3% are Asian American.

The Grammys have received backlash in the past for a lack of a diverse membership along with younger people being deemed ‘unfit’ to join. This increased when it came to modern artists being analyzed by older members who may have not adjusted their views on music when it comes to the time period and social importance of the project within that year. In an article from Variety, Alan Light had five anonymous Grammy members tell the magazine why they voted for who they did and why they chose not to pick other nominees. Described as “*A music business veteran in his 70s*” voter number 4 picked ABBA’s *Voyage* (2021) over *Renaissance* saying the following about Beyoncé, “With Beyoncé, the fact that every time she does something new, it’s a big event and everyone’s supposed to quake in their shoes — it’s a little too portentous.”

Renaissance is a love letter to black women, men, LGBTQIA+ people, ballroom and voguing culture. It is a reflection on Beyoncé’s 20 some plus years in this industry, her entire life up until now. How many of us have watched her grow up without even blinking. The lack of understanding of Beyoncé and her music boils down to people refusing to acknowledge that she is ingrained in our history. Beyoncé became the Winningest person in Grammys history with 32 awards that Sunday; but not give her Album of the Year.

Sources:

<https://time.com/6253244/beyonce-grammys-album-of-the-year-history/>

<https://variety.com/2023/music/news/grammy-voters-secret-ballots-top-categories-beyonce-harry-styles-a-dele-1235511331/>

https://members.recordingacademy.com/s/?language=en_US

<https://www.recordingacademy.com/about>